

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

DRUMS AND SHADOWS

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"Mystic Mojo Incense" is anudduh one uh muh bes selluhs. On duh box it says dis is duh same incense used by duh Hindus an Arabs an Tuks, an also duh Egyptians, an Chinese. In every box is five diffunt culluhs, each one fuh a diffunt puhpose." From a box which Mattie had on hand we took down the directions: "Work the magic spell now. Just hold *Mystic Mojo* in hand and light match to tip. Perfumed with rare fragrance and exotic sandalwood, myrrh and incense. Price 25¢. Sweet and strong."

Mattie also constantly reorders a product known as *Magnetic Lodestone in Holy Oil*. "Dis is used," she explained "tuh drive away evil spirits an bad luck an tuh bring yuh luck in love, an business, an gamblin games. Den deah's *Five Finguh Grass*. A lot uh duh people heah are sked of witches an spirits visitin em at night. Dey hang *Five Finguh Grass* ovuh deah bed aw doeway tuh protec duh whole house.¹¹ Some of em use *Black Cat Incense an Powduh*."

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A few blocks from Mattie Sampson lives William Edwards* who follows the diverse trades of root doctor,¹² piano tuner, and watchman at a filling station. For a while the old man stubbornly insisted that, although he had been a popular root doctor in his younger days, he had not treated a patient in years. After a good deal of casual friendly conversation, he at length admitted that he was at present doctoring a man who had malaria. He also admitted that he was treating a cousin for an ailment and said that by the use of roots he had recently cured another patient of kidney trouble.

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"Muh roots kin cuo mos any pains," he said earnestly. "I wuks on dogs too. I kin cuo a mad dog in lessn a day ef dey git tuh me in time. I make muh medicine frum King Physics. It grows on duh salts an is bery plentiful neah Montgomery, but yuh hab tuh know how tuh fine it.

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"Duh spiduh is bote good and ebil an is useful tuh man.

* William Edwards, corner West Broad and 32nd Streets.

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Table 2. Racial Breakdowns for Five of the Carolina Sea Islands

Year	Population	Edisto	James	Johns	Wadmalaw	St. Helena
1930	Total	1,948	3,058	3,264	2,054	4,626
	Black	1,693	2,419	2,826	1,813	4,458
1940	Total	1,955	3,913	3,534	1,858	4,266
	Black	1,717	2,709	2,633	1,607	3,961
1960	Total	1,589	13,872	6,252	2,326	6,048
	Black	1,306	4,168	3,260	1,980	4,994
1970	Total	1,374	18,969	7,530	2,024	5,718
	Black	1,115	5,217	3,104	1,719	4,278
1980	Total	1,345	27,719	9,296	2,440	8,134
	Black	1,124	6,173	3,975	1,935	4,934

Source: U.S. censuses of population.

paratively remote, do not show any significant population changes. In the late 1970s Edisto Island had only 19 persons per square mile dispersed over a 72.6-square-mile land area. The 1980 census revealed a population of 1,345 persons—another slight decrease. Edisto's population remains predominantly black (84 percent). Its slow growth is attributed to the lack of incorporated areas, of major manufacturers, and of essential services such as water and sewer.¹⁷

Wadmalaw Island, situated between Johns and Edisto, is rural in nature and like Edisto has exhibited very little in- or out-migration. In 1970, 85 percent of the people were black, and this figure had dropped only to 79 percent in 1980. Even though 80 percent of the housing is occupied by owners, Wadmalaw is ranked second in the region in economic distress. It has no water or sewer services, and its only industry is Metal Trades, which provides services primarily for ship repair. Most of the inhabitants are laborers, farmers, and fishermen, though there are an increasing number of professional persons who have returned home to the island to work as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and so on.¹⁸

The addition of more whites is not precipitating an erosion of the traditional social and racial composition of most of the Sea Island communities. They remain isolated, with predominantly black populations. Only the most readily accessible islands, particularly James,

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000 side the roads in the early morning. Opossums are baked with large
252 sweet potatoes, and raccoons are delicacies no islander will refuse.
224 The woods are also the home of rabbits, wolves, foxes, squirrels,
skunks, wildcats, and even bears, all hunted, though bears are said to
be rather rare now. The islanders have generally been able to rely on a
variety of wild game. One seventeenth-century explorer compiled a
list:

224 Deer, of which there is such infinite Herds, that the whole Country
136 seems but one continued Park, insomuch that I have often heard
Captain Matthew, an ingenious Gentleman an Agent to Sir Peter
Colleton for his Affairs in Carolina, say that one hunting Indian
had yearly kill'd and brought to his Plantation more than 100,
sometimes 200 head of Deer. Bears there are in great num-
bers. . . . There are Bevors, Otters, Foxes, Raccoons, Possums,
Musquasses, Hare and Coneys, Squirrels of five kinds, the flying
squirrel, whose delicate skin is commended for comforting, if ap-
plied to a cold Stomach, the Red, the Grey, the Fox and Black
Squirrels.³⁴

825 The islanders, old and young, are fully acquainted with the ways of the
local wild animals. Their partial dependency on these animals as a
food source has caused them to pay closer attention to the animals'
personalities and habits than would a hunter from another area. Thus
their categorization of the animals into intelligent and not-so-intel-
ligent ones is based on day-to-day interaction.³⁵

• 463 In addition to relying on the natural environment,³⁶ many islanders
continue an economic practice which is still the primary method of
consumer exchange in the homelands of their ancestors, selling crafts
and services along with their game and farm produce. Individual island
families are known for "growing" carpenters, tailors, shoemakers,
butchers, cabinetmakers, hairdressers, candlemakers, brickmasons,
builders, farmers, ministers, and herbalists (or "rootmen"). Family
(198) members tend to follow the traditions set by preceding members of the
family and handed down from generation to generation. The old skills
brought from Africa or learned during slavery, when everything needed
for the plantation was made or serviced by the slaves,³⁷ have lingered in
the protected environment of the Sea Islands. Among the skills highly
valued on the islands are carpentry, masonry, and the like—essential

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18 The Social History and Organization

- 463 because the remoteness of the islands means that most of the homes have to be built by the islanders themselves.

285 The Sea Island crafts—jewelry, pottery, fans, baskets—often reflect African styles. Basketry is one of the dominant crafts of the region, and one of the oldest crafts of African origin in the United States.
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463 The baskets were originally made for practical purposes: winnowing rice, carrying clothing, cradling infants, fanning, sorting foods. These were called work baskets and were made of sturdy weaves and such materials as bulrushes and palmetto butts. While the basket weavers still make work baskets, they find that most customers are more interested in their "show baskets," which are lighter and more colorful but less sturdy and sometimes less expensive to make. The show baskets have various designs, ranging from a tiny candle holder to a gigantic woven bin. Whereas the work baskets are relics of the African utility traditions, the show pieces, including purses, vases, and glasses trays, show European influences and are usually decorative in intent. Within recent years the basket weavers of Mt. Pleasant, a town on the South Carolina coast, have gained fame for their skills with the traditional designs. Their baskets are displayed in educational centers and museums of art throughout the United States and elsewhere, and are purchased by art collectors the world over as survivals of an ancient African craft.

285 Various observers have compared the baskets of the South Carolina coast with their African counterparts. According to one knowledgeable collector, there are strong technical links in weave pattern, design, and final product between the Carolina flat and fanner baskets and those of Nigeria, Togo, Benin, and Ghana.³⁸ The Sea Island coiling technique, the manner of stitching, and the pattern of functional use within an agricultural framework have been likened to the style of Senegal, though coiling, an old and widespread technique, is not by itself sufficient to identify an African source.³⁹ Given that similarities in technique and style may be misleading, the deciding factor in comparisons is the cultural milieu of which the baskets are a part. Because Africans were transplanted from the Gold Coast to America, and because Sea Island African-Americans continue to make baskets that are so like the African counterparts that it is almost impossible to differentiate them, it seems reasonable to accept the fact of a historical link.⁴⁰

285 Children, both boys and girls, are taught basketmaking along with the other traditional skills. Boys and men most often gather mate-

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463 aged men work together on construction crews in nearby towns, some commuting as much as fifty miles each day. Younger men are skilled bricklayers, electricians, and boat operators.

Women's work is now much more isolated than was previously the case, with the majority of them engaged in domestic work for individual families or for resort motels on the mainland. With the easing of segregation practices in the region as a whole, some women have moved into jobs in the public domain, such as cashier, store clerk, and delivery of mail. A few women born on the island between 1930 and 1950 have obtained college degrees and now teach in mainland schools or in schools in other states.

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Education is highly valued by island residents. Only one older man in his eighties was encountered who had never attended school. An early school on the island was held in the church building, paid for by island residents themselves. In the thirties one of the wealthy Northerners who had bought a nearby mainland plantation donated funds for a concrete two-room school building on the island and paid the salaries of its first teachers. This school was an elementary one; those who wanted further education boarded with relatives or friends in nearby towns and attended their high schools. In recent years the county school district has provided boat and bus transportation to mainland schools for both elementary and high school students; the island school was closed with consolidation of small county schools about ten years ago.

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121 statistical evidence, participant-observation in the com-
193 munity which confirms these findings, and from the close
family relationships which obtain between several of the
speakers represented in Table 6, who nevertheless show strik-
ing differences in language use.

121 In the mainland community, older men use more
562 standard forms than older women--a finding which differs
193 from that of previous studies of sex differences, except
184 Fasold's study of the black working class in Washington,
D. C. For the island community, women generally use more
standard forms than men in all three age groups, although
speakers in the oldest age group show very little difference
in the use of creole and nonstandard forms. Women in this
group use 31 percent creole and nonstandard variants in 145
possible occurrences, while men use 37 percent of 240. The
heaviest users of standard forms are middle aged women in
the island community.

121 I suggest that sex differences in language used by
562 the two communities are more directly related to occupa-
463 tional opportunities than to sex roles as such. The occu-
193 pational choices are limited by the factor of sex, to be
184 sure, but the sex of speaker affects language choice only
indirectly, in my analysis of the social factors influencing
language choice. In rural South Carolina, the occupations
open to black women have been extremely limited until very
recently. While the vast majority of black women in this

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• 463 region hold jobs outside the home (see U. S. Census Bureau figures, 1973), the major jobs held by them have been teacher or nurse on the professional level and domestic servant or farm laborer at the non-skilled level. Up until the past decade or two, segregation practices kept black women out of most factory jobs and clerical positions. Figures from the [197] 1970 census show that now two of the top five jobs held by black women in rural South Carolina are at the professional level and require use of a standard variety of English daily. [465] Because salary levels for black women are so low (less than half the median salary for black men in the region), and because almost all of them work at some point in their lives, the incentive to prepare for the higher-paying professional jobs available to them is great. Some anecdotal evidence indicates the strength of this incentive for island young people. In one older family, the women had attended college for four generations; men were skilled construction workers with no college education. One man in this family had financed the college educations of two sisters, working as a skilled craftsman himself. When questioned about why no young men from the island attended college, one young man replied that it made no sense unless he were to study for something "big," like a doctor; laying brick he could make more money than a woman teaching school could make. Occupational choices for black men who remain in rural South Carolina are limited chiefly to jobs which require little or

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no use of standard English and which entail little interaction with a diverse public. The top five jobs held by black men in the region are blue collar and require few language-related tasks. Jobs held by island men and by mainland men of the lower socio-economic group are roughly similar blue collar laboring jobs. Those held by mainland men may require fewer skills than the construction jobs held by island men, but none entail daily use of a standard variety of English to any great extent. Mainland and island women, however, have had strikingly different employment patterns and educational opportunities. Mainland women in the group studied have been confined to domestic service or field labor with a limited number of employers. One of these women had lived on a single plantation all of her eighty years, working for one family most of that time. She had had no formal education and could neither read nor write. No woman born on the island was illiterate. Domestic jobs held by island women were varied, ranging from jobs in resort motels to work for middle-class families in mainland communities. Women who had become teachers had moved off the island to be nearer their jobs in mainland schools. In the middle aged and younger group of women from the island, some had obtained jobs as clerks in mainland stores in the past decade and interacted daily with the diverse tourist population which visits coastal South Carolina in the summers. One woman served as mail carrier for a small mainland

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community as well as domestic servant for the post office—
a unique job combination which she handled with skill and
grace. Increasingly, the job patterns of island women are
associated with greater use of standard English than those
of either island men or mainland women in the lower socio-
economic group.

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A second factor which may influence both choice of
language variety and choice of occupation is that of identi-
fication with island life. A more detailed attitudinal
study is needed to describe the dimensions of this factor,
but casual observation and conversation with young people
gave some indication of its importance. In general, young
males seemed to identify more strongly with island life than
young females. Fifth-grade boys expressed some regret that
a ferry would soon connect the island with the mainland,
saying that the island wouldn't be the island anymore. All
girls and women who expressed an opinion about it univers-
ally welcomed the easier access to the mainland that a ferry
would bring. In one large family which had eleven children
ranging from eight years to about twenty-four, the mother
and father had a long-standing argument about the value of
island life. The mother preferred the convenience of main-
land living, while the father maintained that they could
"have more" on the island, in terms of land and material
goods, than they could have anywhere else. A son in his
twenties maintained that he would want to raise his children

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930

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the drivers quite generally remained at home issuing rations and directing the work of the plantation.

R. King, Jr., overseer of the Butler estate, thought that the selection of drivers was one of the "grand points" in plantation management. A cruel driver could demoralize the whole plantation, while an honest one could keep the slaves busy and happy. "An order from a driver," he said in explaining his method of plantation discipline, "is to be as implicitly obeyed as if it came from myself, nor do I counteract the execution, (unless directly injurious,) . . . It would be endless for me to superintend the drivers and field hands too, and would of course make them useless."¹² Miss Harriet Ware, a missionary to St. Helena Island in 1862, described Limus, a driver on one of the St. Helena plantations, as being "very smart" and easy to learn. "He has the energy and *cuteness* and big eye for his own advantage of a born New Englander. He is not very moral or scrupulous, and the church-members will tell you 'not yet,' with a smile, if you ask whether he belongs to them. But he leads them all in enterprise, and his ambition and consequent prosperity make his example a very useful one on the plantation."¹³

Next to the driver in importance and authority were the tradesmen and the house servants. While the num-

¹² *Southern Agriculturist*, Dec. 1828. "But the grand point [in managing the Butler estate] was to suppress the brutality and licentiousness practiced by the principal men on it; (say the drivers and tradesmen). More punishment is inflicted on every plantation by the men in power from private pique, than from a neglect of duty. . . . The driver to screen favourites, or apply their time to his own purposes, imposes a heavy tax on some. Should they murmur, an opportunity is taken, months after, to punish those unfortunate fellows for not doing their own and other tasks. . . . As an evidence of the various opportunities that a brutal driver has to gratify his revenge, . . . let any planter go into his field, and in any Negro's task he can find apparently just grounds for punishment."

¹³ *Letters from Port Royal*, pp. 17-18.

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ber of tradesmen on a plantation depended upon the size of the slaveholding and the plantation economy of the owner, every planter on St. Helena Island who owned as many as thirty slaves had at least one tradesman, usually a carpenter. Sometimes the planter had a head carpenter and several subordinates. The Trescot house on Barnwell Island near St. Helena, which had just been completed at the outbreak of the Civil War, was built entirely by Trescot's own carpenters, such work as window sashes and panellings being done in Charleston.¹⁴

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The carpenter did the building and repair work of the plantation, and when work was slack at home he was usually hired out to neighboring plantations or to some reliable person in Beaufort or Charleston. For instance, in August, 1841, Miss Mary B. Elliott, of Beaufort, paid \$69.50 "to Mrs. Oswald's York for carpenter work."¹⁵ In 1851 H. M. Stuart, of Beaufort, paid Joe \$19 for plastering a room and \$1.50 for mending a chimney.¹⁶

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Thus, some of the plantation tradesmen exercised as many liberties as free Negroes, and they commanded a position of respect among their fellow slaves. Miss Laura M. Towne, a missionary to St. Helena during the Civil War, found Will, a cabinet-maker on one of the Capers plantations, "very discontented because he was ordered to the field, there being no work at his own trade to do." He was able to read and was "very intelligent and self-respecting."¹⁷ Sir Charles Lyell, who visited James Ham-

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¹⁴ William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South*, p. 145. Congressman William Elliott took this house down in 1876, floated it to the town of Beaufort, and erected it just as it had been on Barnwell Island. The house is now owned and occupied by Dr. M. G. Elliott.

¹⁵ Elliott Account Book.

¹⁶ Stuart Receipt Book.

¹⁷ *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, p. 27.

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ilton Couper's Hopeton plantation in 1841, was agreeably surprised to see the rank held there by the black mechanics. "When these mechanics come to consult Mr. Couper on business," he wrote, "their manner of speaking to him is quite as independent as that of English artisans to their employers."¹⁸

Besides the tradesmen, Edward L. Pierce, in 1862 found on the St. Helena Island plantations among the group of laborers "more intelligent than the average," plowmen, watchmen, and religious leaders. Each plantation also had its stock minder who attended to the breeding and care of the stock; and on the better managed plantations, its poultry minder as well. The stock minder frequently served also as coachman for the overseer's family, while the coachman for the planter's family was usually one of the house servants.

Negroes unable to do a full day's work, "quarter hands," "half hands," and "three-quarter hands," usually performed the house work. For instance, the usual house servants on Henry A. Middleton's Weehaw plantation near Georgetown were "a cook that is not a full task[,] a girl of twelve, a boy of fourteen."¹⁹ An old woman did the gardening for the overseer's family, and an old man attended to the overseer's and the owner's horses and served as coachman for the overseer. The house servants attached to the planter's family went back and forth with the family from the plantation to the summer house.

¹⁸ Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States*, I, 267.

¹⁹ Henry A. Middleton, Jr., *Weehaw Plantation Book*. In possession of Langdon Cheves, Charleston, S. C.

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THE TASK SYSTEM

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567 Less than half of a planter's total number of laborers could usually be counted upon for a full day's work.

When Captain Basil Hall visited the United States in 1827 and 1828 he found on a sea-island plantation on St. Simon's Island, Georgia, 122 slaves. Of these, seventy were men and women between the ages of fourteen and fifty; forty-eight were children under the age of fourteen; and four were superannuated. The seventy workers were classified as follows: thirty-nine full hands, sixteen three-quarter hands, eleven half hands, and four quarter hands.

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(359) Out of seventy persons, therefore, the planter had fifty-seven and a half "taskable hands," but those working in the fields were only forty-four taskables, while the other thirteen and a half were employed as cart drivers, nurses, cooks, for the Negroes, carpenters, house servants, and stock minders.³⁰

The number of taskable hands on a plantation varied from year to year. Children were not sent to the field until they were fourteen, but were put to work at minor jobs, pulling weeds, "minding child," picking up trash, washing dishes. Superannuated slaves were also given tasks calling for little physical exertion; such as, gardening, tending horses, nursing, sewing. *Enceinte* women did half tasks until confinement, and women with suckling babies also did half task until the child was eight months old. A slave who had been sick did a portion of a task until he had sufficiently recovered to resume his accustomed amount of work.

³⁰ Captain Basil Hall, *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828*, II, 229.